



Indonesian Pencak Silat Cultural Diplomacy: Analysis of the Spread Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate

Nabil Athaur Rahman¹, Imam Mahdi¹

¹Muhammadiyah University of Yogyakarta, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: Nabil Athaur Rahman

e-mail: nabil.athaur.isip22@mail.umy.ac.id



Article Info

Article history:

Received 20 June 2025

Received in revised form 9

September 2025

Accepted 15 November 2025

Keywords:

Cultural Diplomacy

Pencak Silat

PSHT

Soft Power

Indonesia-Japan

Abstract

This study analyzes the role of Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate (PSHT) as an instrument of Indonesian cultural diplomacy in Japan in the period 2014-2025. Using a qualitative approach with case studies, this study examines how PSHT has succeeded in becoming an intercultural bridge that strengthens Indonesia's soft power through the spread of pencak silat. The results show that the special Japanese branch of PSHT, which was officially established in 2017 in Osaka, has experienced significant growth with the number of members reaching 412 in 2018 and continuing to grow until 2025. PSHT's cultural diplomacy strategy of combining pencak silat with the Reog Ponorogo performance has proven effective in attracting the interest of the Japanese people, including indigenous people who actively join as members. PSHT's success is supported by the synergy between state actors such as the Indonesian Consulate General in Osaka and the Indonesian Embassy in Tokyo with the Indonesian diaspora community and non-governmental organizations. PSHT's participation in various prestigious events such as UNESCO and the Indonesia-Japan Friendship Festival, as well as the holding of the PSHT Japan Cup, proves the effectiveness of pencak silat as a medium of cultural diplomacy that is able to transcend geographical and cultural boundaries. This study concludes that PSHT has succeeded in creating a positive image of Indonesia as a country with high-value cultural wealth, while strengthening the foundation of Indonesia-Japan bilateral relations through an authentic and sustainable people-to-people connection approach.

Introduction

Cultural diplomacy is a strategic instrument in international relations that is increasingly important in the era of globalization. Through the exchange of culture, art, and tradition, cultural diplomacy is able to build bridges of understanding between nations, strengthen cooperation, and reduce the potential for conflict. Robert Sibarani emphasized that cultural diplomacy plays a vital role in strengthening the bonds of cooperation and understanding between countries through soft power that is not coercive, but relies on cultural appeal (Purba, 2024). Thus, cultural diplomacy is an effective tool for shaping a positive image of a country and expanding its influence in the international arena (Antonova & Shevchenko, 2023; Yemets, 2024; Kimani, 2023).

Indonesia, as a country with a very diverse cultural wealth, utilizes cultural diplomacy to strengthen its position and international relations (Khairunnisa, 2024; Cabauatan, 2024; Cahayati & Santoso, 2022). Irsyadi and Aryadiva (2018) stated that pencak silat is used as a tool of cultural diplomacy in the Netherlands to strengthen relations between the two countries through the spread of culture and soft diplomacy (Irsyadi & Aryadiva, 2018). In addition, Sintia Catur highlighted the role of Indonesian cultural diplomacy in proposing pencak silat as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, which simultaneously strengthens Indonesia's soft

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power in the eyes of the world (Sutantri, 2018). This effort shows how traditional culture can be a strategic asset in foreign policy.

Pencak silat as an Indonesian cultural heritage has deep historical and cultural value, as well as being an effective medium for cultural diplomacy. Fernando explains that pencak silat not only functions as a martial art, but also as a tool for soft diplomacy involving state actors and civil society in strengthening Indonesia's image globally (Fernando, 2023). Another study confirms that pencak silat is a cultural bridge in Indonesia-United States relations, strengthening soft power and bilateral cooperation (Widyadhana et al., 2025). Thus, pencak silat plays a dual role as a cultural heritage and an instrument of cultural diplomacy.

This study will focus on the spread of pencak silat Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate (PSHT) in Japan as an intercultural bridge. Japan, as a country with a rich and diverse culture, is a strategic place for the spread of pencak silat which is not only a sport and martial art, but also a medium for cultural exchange. Through the PSHT Special Branch of Japan, pencak silat is introduced and practiced by Indonesian and Japanese communities, thus building a cultural dialogue that strengthens relations between the two countries. This study aims to examine how PSHT plays a role in cultural diplomacy and strengthens intercultural relations between Indonesia and Japan.

Research on cultural diplomacy has been widely conducted and has become an important study in international relations (Higgott & Lamonica, 2021; Ociepka & Arendarska, 2021; Kimani, 2023). First, Cummings defines cultural diplomacy as the exchange of ideas, information, art, language, and other aspects of culture between countries and their societies with the aim of building mutual understanding and strengthening international relations (Cummings, 2003). Second, Warsito and Kartikasari emphasize in their book "Cultural Diplomacy: Concept and Relevance for Developing Countries; Case Study of Indonesia" that cultural diplomacy is a country's effort to fight for national interests through cultural dimensions, such as education, art, and tradition, which function as soft power tools to achieve foreign policy goals without violence (Warsito & Kartikasari, 2007). Third, Kartikasari also explains that cultural diplomacy is not only carried out by the government, but also involves the private sector and civil society as a means to show the level of national civilization and build a positive image in the eyes of the world through inclusive and sustainable cultural exchanges (Kartikasari, 2020).

Furthermore, the concept of soft power introduced by Joseph Nye is an important basis for cultural diplomacy. Nye stated that soft power is the ability of a country to influence other countries through cultural appeal, values, and policies without using military or economic power. In practice, soft power is manifested through the spread of culture, art, and traditions that build harmonious relations between countries (Yani & Lusiana, 2018; Bwire, 2021; Nur Mutia & de Archellie, 2023; Nye, 2023). Waller added that cultural diplomacy as a form of soft power involves various actors, including non-governmental organizations and civil society, so that it is inclusive in building international relations (Khatrunada & Alam, 2019; Isar & Triandafyllidou, 2021; Hussain, 2023). Nye also emphasized the importance of credibility and consistency in conveying cultural values so that cultural diplomacy is effective in building long-term trust and influence.

In addition, pencak silat as an Indonesian cultural heritage has been used as an effective cultural diplomacy tool. Irsyadi and Aryadiva revealed that pencak silat was used as Indonesia's soft power in the Netherlands to strengthen relations between the two countries through cultural exchanges and martial arts. Pencak silat also plays a role in cultural diplomacy between Indonesia and the United States as a cultural bridge that strengthens bilateral cooperation (Irsyadi & Aryadiva, 2018). The use of pencak silat in cultural diplomacy shows that traditional

arts are not only a cultural heritage, but also a strategic instrument to strengthen Indonesia's image and influence at the international level.

Then in the context of cultural dissemination through diplomacy: mechanisms and strategies for disseminating traditional culture abroad. The dissemination of traditional culture through diplomacy is carried out through various mechanisms such as cultural exchanges, training, art festivals, and international competitions. Warsito and Kartikasari stated that cultural dissemination strategies must be adjusted to the local context and involve various actors, both government and civil society, to create sustainable and mutually beneficial relationships (Warsito & Kartikasari, 2007). Waller emphasized the importance of integrating various media and means of communication such as films, art performances, traditional sports, and academic exchanges in expanding the reach of cultural diplomacy (Yani & Lusiana, 2018; Atta & Siddiq, 2023; Banerjee, 2024). A concrete example is the dissemination of pencak silat through the Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate (PSHT) organization in Japan, which involves diaspora communities and non-state actors in international training and performances as a medium for cultural dialogue that strengthens relations between nations. This research will focus on PSHT's strategy in the spread and development of pencak silat in Japan as well as its social impact and role in improving Indonesia's image in the international arena, providing a new contribution to the understanding of cultural diplomacy through pencak silat as a bridge between cultures.

The spread of PSHT pencak silat in Japan also reflects non-state cultural diplomacy involving diaspora communities and pencak silat organizations as important actors in strengthening Indonesia's soft power. The presence of PSHT in Japan opens up opportunities to introduce Indonesian cultural values directly to Japanese society, while building mutually beneficial social and cultural networks (Sarbaitinil et al., 2023; Guo & Han, 2021). This is in accordance with the concept of cultural diplomacy that emphasizes the role of civil society and non-state actors in building more inclusive and sustainable international relations.

Thus, this study will explore the mechanism of the spread of PSHT pencak silat in Japan as a form of effective cultural diplomacy in building intercultural bridges. This study is expected to contribute to the development of Indonesia's cultural diplomacy strategy abroad, especially through traditional martial arts that have high historical and social values.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study that focuses on the spread of Pencak Silat PSHT in Japan as a form of cultural diplomacy. According to Creswell, qualitative research aims to explore and understand the meanings that individuals or groups associate with a social phenomenon or problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The qualitative approach was chosen to allow for an in-depth understanding of the socio-cultural phenomena that occur, especially how PSHT acts as an intercultural bridge between Indonesia and Japan. Data collection techniques used include in-depth interviews with PSHT actors and administrators in Japan, indirect (online) observation of training activities and cultural interactions, and documentation studies in the form of archives, publications, and recordings of activities related to PSHT. This method allows researchers to explore the meaning and dynamics of the spread of pencak silat culture in the context of cultural diplomacy comprehensively.

Data analysis in this study uses the theoretical framework of cultural diplomacy and the concept of soft power to understand how PSHT functions as a non-formal diplomacy tool that influences intercultural perceptions and relations (Ang, Isar, & Mar, 2015). The collected data were analyzed thematically by identifying cultural communication patterns, dissemination strategies, and the resulting socio-cultural impacts. This approach is in line with the principles of qualitative analysis that emphasize the interpretation of meaning and social context, so that

the results of the study can provide a holistic picture of the role of PSHT in strengthening cultural relations between Indonesia and Japan through cultural diplomacy.

Results and Discussion

History and Expansion of PSHT in Japan: Building the Foundation of Cultural Diplomacy

Historical Traces and Dynamics of PSHT Development in Japan

The Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate (PSHT) began to be known in Japan in 2014, when a number of Indonesian immigrants working in the land of cherry blossoms were identified as PSHT members. This phenomenon sparked internal discussions in the Osaka area to develop the organization and introduce Indonesian culture through PSHT's pencak silat martial arts and Reog Ponorogo performances. After going through a fairly long process, the special Japanese branch of PSHT was officially established on August 13, 2017 in Osaka with Kangmas Andri Kurniawan as chairman and Kangmas Jatmiko as chairman of the branch board. This establishment was strengthened by a Decree from the Central PSHT Management in Madiun, East Java, Indonesia, which provided formal legitimacy to the existence of this organization in Japan.

Over time, PSHT in Japan has experienced very rapid development. This organization is no longer centered in Osaka, but has begun to spread to various regions in Japan such as Tokyo, Nagoya, Fukushima, Miyagi, Aomori, Tohoku, and Kyoto. The unique combination of pencak silat as a typical Indonesian martial art with the beauty of Reog Ponorogo has increasingly attracted the interest of the local community. By the end of 2018, the number of PSHT members throughout Japan had reached 412 people, consisting of Indonesian immigrants and native Japanese citizens. This development shows that the special Japanese branch of PSHT is consistent in promoting Indonesian culture through martial arts and cultural performances held in various international events.

Cultural Diplomacy Dissemination and Implementation Strategy

PSHT Special Branch of Japan has implemented an effective cultural diplomacy strategy through various arts and pencak silat activities. According to Kangmas Jatmiko, PSHT utilizes the momentum of international festivals as a medium to disseminate PSHT's pencak silat culture. One significant achievement is the opportunity to present PSHT with Reog at the UNESCO event, which signifies global recognition of Indonesian culture. In addition, PSHT is routinely invited to perform at the Indonesia-Japan Friendship Festival (IJFF) which is directly supported by the Head of the Indonesian Embassy in Tokyo, Ambassador Heri Akhmadi, as an effort to strengthen bilateral cultural relations between Indonesia and Japan (Oktavianti, Sari, & Nariah, 2024).

Not only relying on invitations from major events, PSHT Japan is also active in holding its own events, such as a pencak silat art performance accompanied by reog ponorogo in Osaka and participating in the Hachinohe International Festival. PSHT Japan also organizes the All-Japan pencak silat championship (PSHT JAPAN CUP) which is not only a sports competition event, but also an effective means to promote pencak silat culture to Japanese citizens and the international community (Anonim, 2022). Through the combination of sports and culture, PSHT has succeeded in creating a wider cultural diplomacy space and strengthening Indonesia's cultural identity abroad.

The Role of Noble Values in PSHT Cultural Diplomacy

PSHT Special Branch Japan carries out cultural diplomacy fully supported by the central organization and leaders, including the General Chairperson who emphasizes noble character and spiritual education in every activity. By combining noble values, arts and culture, and sports, PSHT does not merely preserve pencak silat, but makes it an effective soft power tool to strengthen Indonesia's position on the world stage.

Values such as brotherhood, noble character (*akhlakul karimah*), and solidarity that are characteristic of Indonesian culture are taught through PSHT's routine training and activities. This approach builds an inclusive community, where Japanese citizens from various backgrounds, from students to adults, are starting to be interested and actively participate in training until they become official members, showing a real appreciation for Indonesian culture. Diplomacy through pencak silat proves that martial arts can be a medium to convey messages of brotherhood and national pride, where through a combination of art performances, international competitions, and values of brotherhood, PSHT has succeeded in building a positive reputation and expanding the influence of Indonesian culture globally, especially in Japan.

Synergy of State and Non-State Actors in Strengthening Cultural Diplomacy

Support for Indonesian Diplomatic Representation

The role of state actors is crucial in supporting PSHT's pencak silat cultural diplomacy in Japan. The Indonesian Consulate General in Osaka as a representative of Indonesia in West Japan actively provides real support for PSHT activities, one of which is the participation of the Indonesian Consul General Diana Emila who opened the 2022 PSHT Japan Cup Championship in Osaka. In her remarks, Mrs. Diana emphasized the commitment of the Indonesian Consulate General in Osaka to continue to support and strengthen synergy with the PSHT community in Japan so that the promotion of Indonesian culture, especially pencak silat, can be further expanded in Japan (Anonim, 2022).

In addition to the Indonesian Consulate General in Osaka, the Indonesian Embassy in Tokyo also provides significant support for PSHT activities in Japan. PSHT is routinely invited to perform at the Indonesia-Japan Friendship Festival (IJFF), where they perform pencak silat combined with Reog Ponorogo art. This activity received direct support from the Head of the Indonesian Embassy in Tokyo, Ambassador Heri Akhmadi, who considered cultural diplomacy through pencak silat as an effective means to strengthen bilateral relations between Indonesia and Japan. The form of support from the Indonesian Embassy in Tokyo was also realized through the inauguration of the management and membership of PSHT along with the Reog Ponorogo cultural team by Ambassador Heri, who was accompanied by the Coordinator of Political Functions, Andi Ardiansyah, and the Education and Culture Attaché, Yusli Wardiatno (Oktavianti, 2024).

Contribution of Non-State Actors in Cultural Diplomacy

The role of non-state actors is also very important in this cultural diplomacy. Indonesian immigrants and native Japanese people who love pencak silat and Reog Ponorogo actively support PSHT activities. PSHT members in Japan specifically raise funds to enrich the inventory of pencak silat equipment which is the main instrument in cultural diplomacy. Their involvement shows that cultural diplomacy is not only the task of the government, but also a collective movement that involves the wider community as ambassadors of Indonesian culture abroad.

Japanese citizens who join PSHT not only learn self-defense techniques, but also adopt the values of local Indonesian wisdom taught in this organization, such as respect, discipline, and brotherhood without age or background limits. This creates a space for cultural dialogue that enriches both communities and fosters a sense of admiration and respect for Indonesian traditions and philosophies. The members of PSHT Japan, consisting of native Japanese citizens and Indonesian immigrants, actively promote Indonesian culture to various levels of Japanese society, making them effective non-state actors in cultural diplomacy.

PSHT as an Intercultural Bridge

PSHT acts as an intercultural bridge that strengthens relations between Indonesia and Japan by increasing understanding and appreciation of cross-country cultures. One concrete evidence of this role is the visit of Japanese PSHT members to the PSHT center in Madiun, Indonesia. This visit aims to explore the history, philosophy, and science of PSHT pencak silat directly from the source, thereby strengthening cultural ties and deepening their understanding of the noble values contained in PSHT.

In addition, the General Chairperson of PSHT routinely visits Japan every year to provide spiritual teachings and carry out new member graduations or member confirmations. This activity not only strengthens the organization's ties at the international level, but also becomes an important moment in the transfer of PSHT's cultural and spiritual values to members in Japan. The direct presence of the PSHT leadership in Japan shows a strong commitment to maintaining the continuity of culture and character education that are the hallmarks of this school. Through regular interactions between PSHT members in Japan and the PSHT center in Indonesia, there is an intense and mutually enriching cultural exchange, which in turn strengthens bilateral relations between the two countries.

The synergy established between state actors such as the Indonesian Consulate General in Osaka and the Indonesian Embassy in Tokyo with the PSHT community and support from non-state actors strengthens Indonesia's cultural diplomacy in Japan. This effort not only introduces pencak silat as a rich and unique cultural heritage, but also builds a social and emotional bridge between the two countries. In the future, this collaboration is expected to be even closer so that pencak silat can become a symbol of friendship and strengthening of sustainable bilateral relations between Indonesia and Japan.

Implications and Development of PSHT Cultural Diplomacy

PSHT's Contribution to Strengthening Indonesia's Soft Power

The Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate (PSHT) has become an effective instrument of Indonesian soft power in Japan through a comprehensive cultural diplomacy approach. Since its official establishment in 2017 in Osaka, PSHT has succeeded in expanding its reach to various regions of Japan with a significant increase in the number of members. PSHT's success in attracting interest not only from Indonesian immigrants but also from native Japanese citizens shows the effectiveness of pencak silat as an instrument of soft power that is able to transcend cultural and geographical boundaries, while strengthening Indonesia's positive image in the eyes of the international community.

PSHT's diplomatic strategy of combining the martial art of pencak silat with the Reog Ponorogo performance has created a unique and attractive cultural platform for the Japanese people. PSHT's participation in prestigious events such as UNESCO and the Indonesia-Japan Friendship Festival (IJFF), as well as the holding of the Japan-wide pencak silat championship (PSHT JAPAN CUP), proves that PSHT not only preserves Indonesian culture but also actively projects the noble values of the Indonesian nation to the international stage (Anonim, 2022).

Through these activities, PSHT has succeeded in building a positive narrative about Indonesia which is rich in cultural heritage and values of brotherhood, thus strengthening Indonesia's attractiveness as an important component of soft power (Oktavianti et al., 2024).

The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Strengthening Bilateral Relations

Cultural diplomacy, as described in the book "Diplomasi Budaya" by Tulus Warsito and Wahyuni Kartikasari, plays a strategic role in strengthening bilateral relations between Indonesia and Japan through practices implemented by the Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate (PSHT) (Warsito & Kartikasari, 2007). As an effort by a country to fight for national interests through a broad cultural dimension, PSHT has become an effective instrument in strengthening Indonesia's soft power in Japan. PSHT activities reflect the real application of the concept of cultural diplomacy which is not only limited to negotiations, but also the management of international relations in peaceful situations.

The role of cultural diplomacy in bilateral relations between Indonesia and Japan through PSHT also reflects the essence of soft power as stated by Joseph Nye. Through art performances, international competitions, and values of brotherhood, PSHT has succeeded in building the appeal of Indonesian culture without using coercion, while creating a space for dialogue that enriches both communities. The active involvement of Japanese citizens in PSHT activities not only shows their interest in pencak silat as a martial art, but also their appreciation of the philosophy and noble values contained therein. The ability to obtain what is desired through this cultural appeal is a manifestation of effective soft power in building Indonesia's image and influence in Japan, as well as strengthening Indonesia's position in international politics.

Recommendations for the Development of Cultural Diplomacy

Based on the success of the Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate (PSHT) in strengthening bilateral relations between Indonesia and Japan, the development of cultural diplomacy through traditional martial arts needs to be strengthened with a more systematic and integrated approach. The Indonesian government, especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, should develop a comprehensive cultural diplomacy strategy by making pencak silat and other traditional martial arts one of the priorities in promoting Indonesian culture abroad. This strategy can begin with the formation of a special task force consisting of diplomatic representatives, pencak silat practitioners, academics, and the Indonesian diaspora community to design a more structured and sustainable cultural diplomacy program.

Strengthening the capacity of non-state actors such as Indonesian pencak silat schools and cultural communities abroad is also an important recommendation in developing effective cultural diplomacy. The Indonesian government needs to allocate a special budget to support activities initiated by pencak silat communities abroad, such as the procurement of training equipment, performance costumes, and funding for cultural festivals. Training of trainers programs also need to be developed to increase the capacity of pencak silat instructors abroad, especially in terms of teaching methodology and understanding the local cultural context in which they operate.

Then innovation in the presentation and promotion of traditional martial arts needs to be continuously developed to increase its appeal and relevance in a global context. As has been done by PSHT in Japan by combining pencak silat and Reog Ponorogo, developing a performance format that combines martial arts with other Indonesian cultural elements can be an effective strategy to attract international public interest. The use of digital technology and social media also needs to be maximized to reach a wider audience, for example through

educational video content, pencak silat learning applications, or online streaming of performances. By adopting a more innovative and adaptive approach to the development of the times, cultural diplomacy through traditional martial arts can remain relevant and effective in building stronger bilateral relations.

Conclusion

The Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate (PSHT) has proven itself as an effective and strategic instrument of cultural diplomacy in strengthening Indonesia's soft power in Japan. Starting from an initiative of the Indonesian workers' community in 2014 to its official establishment in 2017, the Japanese branch of PSHT has successfully transformed from a mere expatriate community into a solid intercultural bridge. Significant membership growth—reaching 412 members in 2018 with an increase of 100-200 members per year until 2025—demonstrates the high acceptability of pencak silat in Japanese society. The geographic expansion strategy that reaches major cities such as Tokyo, Nagoya, Kyoto, and the Tohoku region, reinforced by a smart cultural approach that combines pencak silat performances with Reog Ponorogo, has created an attractive Indonesian cultural promotion package. The success in attracting the participation of native Japanese citizens, including students, confirms the effectiveness of PSHT in building deep cultural penetration and making pencak silat part of the cultural diversity landscape that is appreciated in Japan.

The success of PSHT as an agent of Indonesian cultural diplomacy in Japan requires continued support from various stakeholders. Synergistic collaboration between state actors such as the Embassy and Ministry of Foreign Affairs with non-governmental organizations and diaspora communities is crucial to maximize the impact of cultural diplomacy. Adequate funding, administrative facilitation, and formal recognition of PSHT's efforts are essential to maintain the positive momentum that has been built. Systematic training programs for pencak silat practitioners in cultural diplomacy aspects also need to be developed to increase their capacity as Indonesian cultural ambassadors. The Indonesian government needs to integrate pencak silat, especially PSHT, into a broader national cultural diplomacy strategy, taking into account the potential of pencak silat as a cultural product that can be accepted globally while still maintaining Indonesia's distinctive identity.

Further research is needed to analyze in more depth how the philosophical values of pencak silat can contribute to intercultural dialogue and conflict resolution in the context of international relations. Comparative studies on the effectiveness of pencak silat compared to local Japanese martial arts such as Judo or Karate in building cultural bridges can also provide valuable insights. Evaluation of the long-term impact of cultural diplomacy through PSHT on Japanese public perception of Indonesia and its implications for bilateral relations in economic, political, and social aspects is another potential research area. From a policy perspective, the Indonesian government needs to develop a comprehensive strategic framework for cultural diplomacy by placing pencak silat as one of the main elements. This policy should include mapping of geographical targets, proportional resource allocation, training programs for cultural practitioners, and a systematic evaluation mechanism to measure the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy in achieving Indonesia's foreign policy goals.

The presence of PSHT in Japan has made a significant contribution in strengthening the foundation of bilateral relations between Indonesia and Japan through an authentic people-to-people connection approach. As a manifestation of soft power, PSHT has succeeded in creating a positive image of Indonesia as a country with a rich culture that is of high value and relevant in a global context. The acceptance of pencak silat by the Japanese people reflects the existence of universal elements in Indonesian culture that can bridge differences and create intercultural

meeting points. This success provides a solid foundation for the development of broader bilateral cooperation in various sectors including education, tourism, and the creative industry. Furthermore, cultural diplomacy through PSHT has opened up a space for productive intercultural dialogue, facilitated the exchange of values and knowledge that enriches both parties, and contributed to the formation of a cross-cultural community that can be a catalyst for strengthening long-term relations between Indonesia and Japan.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to express his deepest gratitude for the publication of this journal article, especially to all administrators of the PSHT Special Branch of Japan who have provided full support in this research. The author would like to express his sincere gratitude to Kangmas Jatmiko as the Chairman of the Japanese Branch Council who has been willing to take the time to be interviewed and provide important data that is very valuable for the completeness of this research. The author would also like to express his deepest gratitude to Dr. Imam Mahdi, S.IP. MA as the supervisor who has patiently and with high dedication provided constructive guidance, input, and direction in every stage of writing this research, so that this journal article can be completed well and is worthy of publication.

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